

awa life

Tokushima Glass Studio

August 2025

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My Life as an Exchange
Student in Japan

Planting the Seeds of
Cultural Understanding

Nihongo Know-it-all:
Awa Odori Vocab

Tokushima Station, Tokushima City
徳島市、徳島駅



TOPIA

Awa Life is a Monthly Publication of the Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association

Happy August, everyone! Of course, we can't start our August edition without mentioning Awa Odori! For many, this month is what they wait all year in excitement for. Even in the height of summer heat, hundreds of thousands of people travel from all over the world to see the Awa Odori festival in Tokushima City from August 11-15.

This year, the opening celebration will be at ASTY Tokushima on the 11th, and the dancing at various outdoor stages and areas throughout the city will start from the 12th. In addition to dancing, there will be plenty of food stalls, games, live music, etc. The city truly does come to life like no other time, and if you haven't been, I can't recommend it enough. Even if you don't buy tickets to sit in the stands, there's still plenty of dancing and festivities to be seen for free. Both of your Awa Life editors will be dancing with various *ren* this year, so make sure to cheer extra hard if you see us!

For all of those who like writing, please feel free to submit an article to us at any point in time about basically anything. There are a few limitations though, such as you can't write about religion, politics, commercial activities or businesses, or anything that we deem inappropriate. But, other than that, we would be more than happy to receive articles about anything and everything including but not limited to concerts, lectures, other events, culture, sports, community group information or anything cool that's happening in your local community. Additionally, please keep articles around ~400-700 words (if writing in English), or ~1000 characters (if writing in Japanese). If you have any questions or want to check if your topic will work, feel free to reach out to us before you start writing.

We highly appreciate all of your articles and we love reading them. So if that writing bug of yours is buzzing about, grab a pen or a computer and write and send away! Please send all submissions to our email:

awalife@gmail.com

Your editors,
Riley and Lisa

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Download a PDF file of awa life or view the online version by going to TOPIA's website!



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Planting the Seeds of Cultural Understanding

By: Kang Le (康樂)

As I write this, it has been almost 3 months since I started my job as a Coordinator for International Relations in Mima City, and I have gradually grown accustomed to my life here in Tokushima. In Mima, there are no high-rise skyscrapers, or bustling “cityscapes” to be seen. Instead, a certain inner peace can be found surrounded by nature.



As a CIR in Mima, one of my main job duties is school visits. These can include lectures, interviews, and/or exchange activities, and cover a wide range of topics related to Chinese culture,

language, and daily life. Since being appointed, I have done a total of 14 lectures in classes (5 kindergarten, 5 elementary school, and 4 junior high school visits), participated in a junior high Ping Pong club sports exchange, and conducted five interviews with students, staff, and caregivers. These visits allow teachers and students to learn

more about China, deepen their understanding of other cultures, and help solve communication problems between Chinese students, their parents, and the school so that they can better adapt to life in Japan.

Throughout these visits, I've felt that each grade level has its own unique energy and level of cross-cultural understanding. I feel that I've been able to witness how culture awareness starts: as a seed which eventually blossoms and grows with the child.

The Curious Mind of a Kindergartener: Seeing the World Through Pure Eyes

Entering the activity room of the kindergarten, I was greeted by cheerful voices and walls decorated with children's drawings. The cultural class I held that day was designed specifically to capture the attention and interest of the young children, consisting of Chinese music, dance, games, and a slideshow presentation on the theme of animals. I couldn't help but to smile as the kids cheerfully called out the names of the animals and imitated their sounds. I was amazed at their knowledge—some of the children were even able to name all the Chinese zodiac signs.

Next, we sang, danced, and played games together. The Chinese version of the game

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“Red light, green light” was a hit, and the kids played it over and over again without tiring. And of course, everyone had a blast learning the “Bunny Rabbit” and “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” dances. Music, dance, and play have the power to transcend language and country borders, and it was heartwarming to see young minds, unbound by stereotypes, embrace different cultures with pure curiosity. As I left that day, looking upon the pouting faces of the kids sad to see me go, I felt that the seeds of cultural understanding had indeed been sown.

The Inquisitive Mind of a Grade Schooler: Building a Bridge Across Cultures

The elementary school students showed a more logical inquisitiveness during my cultural presentation. We compared the lives of Japanese and Chinese elementary school students, searching out not only differences, but things in common with one another. As I showed them a video of famous tourist attractions in China, the students oohed and aahed, the curiosity in different cultures palpable throughout the room.



In the “Interesting Kanji” section of my presentation, I explained the origin of Chinese characters and the differences between Chinese and Japanese kanji. When the children learned that the same characters in Chinese and Japanese can have completely different meanings, they went beyond mere curiosity and began to ask “Why?” I believe this kind of inquisitiveness is the driving force that leads cultural exchange from superficial understanding to deeper contemplation.

The Accepting Mind of a Junior High Schooler: Fostering Values that Embrace Diversity

The cultural exchange class at the junior high school promoted a deeper cultural understanding through thinking and discussion. I taught the

kids about China’s larger-than-life nature, long history, and rich culture, as well as discussed differences between the Chinese and Japanese educational systems. I did my best to emphasize to the students that although school and studying may be difficult, a strong education expands the possibilities of the future, and encouraged them to cherish their current student life.

When I introduced my own experience of international exchange and the nature of my

work, the atmosphere in the classroom became even more lively, and a heated discussion ensued on the topic of cultural integration and preservation of individuality. It was very impressive to see the students discussing while still respecting each other’s differing opinions. In particular, the comment from one of the students, “International exchange is about different cultures developing together,” has

stuck with me. I could see the potential and maturity unique to young people in the way the junior high school students integrated cultural awareness into a sense of values.

Through the school visits, I have come to realize that it’s important to meet kids where they’re at when it comes to cross-cultural awareness. Each stage of growth for a child is an important step in the process of cultural understanding: stimulating curiosity in kindergarten, knowledge building in elementary school, and value formation in junior high school.

As a CIR, I would like to continue to seek better ways of communicating with children in accordance with their developmental needs and interests, and to continue to plant the seeds of cross-cultural understanding and coexistence in the classroom.

Tokushima Glass Studio

By: Rishmita Siyal

Being someone who loves going to various workshops and creating in general, I had read about the Tokushima Glass Studio online before, and recently I finally decided to go and try it out with a friend.



We made a reservation one day prior and visited on a Sunday, choosing to do the 吹きガラス体験 (fukigarasu taiken) glass blowing experience. As we entered, they showed us where we would be making our own glass creations, and told us to fill out a form with a list of options. We could choose the size, shape, design, color and even texture of our creations!

After that, we were given aprons and gloves and then the professionals started the workshop with an explanation, guiding us through each step. The actual glass blowing was done one by one, so you'll have to wait your turn if you visit in a group, but you can watch the process and take photos while you wait. Here's a rundown of the process:

- Adding color: First, we first dipped the metal

rod in molten glass and then touched it to colored beads.

- Glass blowing: It took a while, but we eventually were able to blow through the tube to successfully get our glass creations to the desired size.



Shaping and separating: After the glass reaches a certain size, you can shape it in the way you choose.

I chose a simple vase, but my friend went for a heart-shaped bowl!

- Finally, you separate your glass creation from the rest of the rod using a metal ruler as a saw and then gently tapping it.



After we made our vase and bowl, we had to wait about a week for our creations to be ready to be picked up. I opted for a matte finish (サンドペーパー仕上げ) on mine, which was done in a sandpaper machine once the week had passed. And with that, our beautiful glass pieces were made in one week and 30 minutes! ><

My Life as an Exchange Student in Japan

By: Wang Boyuan (王博源)

In the blink of an eye, a decade has passed since I first came to Japan. Looking back to 2014, I remember how I first stepped into this foreign land alone, full of anticipation and excitement. In the years since then, I have experienced many things and discovered new ways of thinking, which I'd now like to share with you all.

I first began studying Japanese in middle school, continuing all three years. After graduating, I decided to come to Japan as an exchange student. There were two main reasons I was so set on coming to Japan: the first was that the academic pressure in my hometown was

overwhelming; I wanted to find my own way to pursue personal growth. The second reason was that I felt very drawn towards a new way of living, and wanted to experience a new culture and expand my point of view.

Starting my new life as a high school student in Japan, I found that it was fun and fulfilling, but also took time getting used to. The knowledge and learning methods were completely different than what I was used to, and although I don't think the actual content was that difficult looking back, at the time I keenly felt the cultural and language barriers. Japanese class was particularly difficult,

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and I frequently struggled with grammar and vocabulary. At the time, my Japanese teacher told me to pick a piece of news each week that interested me and write down my thoughts on it. That habit of keeping up with the news has stuck with me, and to this day I still read the newspaper each morning. At first, I felt ashamed when I stumbled over a kanji or word, but I kept challenging myself each day, determined to not lose to the language barrier.



To lessen the divide between me and my classmates, I spent my time after school with my nose buried in a dictionary, practicing vocabulary and pronunciation on repeat. When I came across a word that I didn't know, I would write it down in my notebook and read it over and over to solidify it in my memory. Eventually, after hours upon hours of hard work, my Japanese level gradually improved. I finally became able to read the newspaper fluently, and the Japanese teacher who first gave me that assignment acknowledged my improvement. Even today I am still grateful to that teacher for her gentle and considerate guidance and support. Aside from studying, I also entered the badminton club, where I ended up meeting many of my friends. Thanks to them, I was able to have a more involved and authentic experience of life in Japan.

After high school I stayed in Japan and enrolled in a university, majoring in Computer Science. My first specialized course were difficult, but I never gave up. I believe that if you don't quit, you will always find a way to overcome difficulties, creating your own path forward. After graduating university, I temporarily entered the work force, but eventually decided to go back to school for my master's degree—bringing me to Tokushima.

Tokushima is a place rich in both nature and kindness. I've crossed Oboke Gorge on foot, savored the serenity of old forests and deep valleys, and crossed the Kazurabashi Vine Bridge in Iya. I've enjoyed the grand mountains—climbing Mount Oasayama, Bizan, and Tsurugi—as well as taken in the dynamic Naruto whirlpools. These trips refreshed my body and soul and deepened my understanding of Tokushima's culture and nature. Every summer, Tokushima is enveloped in the lively rhythms of the Awa Odori dance. A festive atmosphere floods the city as if the entire town is dancing to the sound of taiko drums and dancing. I am also deeply drawn to Tokushima's indigo-dyed handicrafts, the deep blue of which reminds me of the depth of the sea and the power of nature.

I joined the Tokushima Prefectural International Association (TOPIA) in order to integrate more deeply into Tokushima and strengthen ties with the local community. Working part-time at TOPIA, I helped foreign residents adjust to life in Tokushima by giving them advice on daily living, travel information, tourism guidance, etc. I found the work extremely rewarding, and I was able to develop many friendships along the way. After having immersed myself in cross-cultural communication, my attachment to Tokushima has only deepened even further.



Looking back over the past ten years, I have gained so much in the way of academics, friendship, and culture. The path has been full of challenges, but overcoming them one by one has only strengthened my belief in moving forward with a positive outlook. From here on out, I will continue to work hard and treasure each step forward I take.

Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: 徳島の海水浴場

By: Junko Kimura

徳島県には、海水浴場がいくつかあります。夏になると、家族や友だちと海へ行く人がたくさんいます。海では、泳いだり、砂で遊んだりして、楽しい時間を過ごせます。

日本の海水浴場には「海開き」があります。海開きのあいだは、ライフガードがいたり、シャワーやトイレが使えたりして、安全に海で遊べます。

徳島県内の海水浴場です。徳島市：小松海水浴場（8月24日まで）、
 阿南市：北の脇海水浴場（8月25日まで）、淡島海水浴場（8月20日まで）、
 松茂町：月見が丘海水浴場（8月18日まで）、美波町：田井ノ浜海水浴場（8月24日まで）、海陽町：大砂海水浴場（8月20日まで）



小松海水浴場は、サーフィンができます。多くの人が海遊びを楽しんでいます。月見が丘海水浴場は、空港の近くにあり、飛行機が見えます。北の脇、田井ノ浜、大砂海水浴場などは、とくに水や景色がきれいです。

海は、ライフガードがいる時間にいきましょう。また、天気や波の様子にも気をつけてください。ごみは持ち帰り、みんなで海をきれいに守りましょう。

徳島の海で、楽しい夏の思い出をつくってください。

Vocabulary List

かいすいよくじょう 海水浴場	Swimming beach	けしき 景色	Scenery	あんぜん 安全に	Safely
うみびら 海開き	Opening of beach season	ライフガード	Lifeguard		

Awa Odori Vocab

By: Riley Henke

Nihongo Know-it-all

In celebration of August—a.k.a Awa Odori season—we're going to be covering some essential Awa Odori vocabulary and phrases in this month's Awa Life. Let's all study up so we can enjoy this lively festival to the fullest this year!



連 (Ren) - A dance group/troupe of Awa Odori. You will see 連 added to each the end group's name, for example, TOPIA's Arasowaren (あらそわ連).

女踊り (Onna odori) - The dance style traditionally performed by women

男踊り (Otoko odori) - The dance style traditionally performed by men

鳴り物 (Narimono) - The musical instruments/accompaniment to the Awa Odori dance

高張提灯 (Takahari chochin) - The large paper lanterns held up at the front of each ren with the group's name written on it. Some dance holding smaller lanterns as well, simply called chochin.

There are also several chants shouted during the Awa Odori dance. For example, spectators may hear shouts of ヤットサー! ア、ヤットヤット! (Yatto sa! A yatto yatto!). The origins of this chant are unclear, but in practice, it is something with no specific meaning yelled to hype up both the dancers and the crowd. Last but not least, we have the phrase 踊る阿呆に見る阿呆 同じ阿呆なら踊らにや損々 (Odoru ahō ni miru ahō, onaji ahō nara odoranya son son), meaning "The fool dancing and the fool watching; if both are fools alike, you might as well dance!" This phrase is said to encapsulate the spirit of Awa Odori—you don't have to worry about looking good or showing off your flawless moves. As long as you're here, you might as well join in the dance and have fun!

助詞「で」 / 助詞「に」

This month, we're going to learn about the 「に」 and 「で」 particles, which express location or position. First, check the verb in the sentence, and then choose 「で」 or 「に」 depending on if the place is indicating where the verb/action is taking place (で), or if it is where something exists (に).

1. Location where an action is taking place:

「〇〇で」～します、^た食べます、^の飲みます、^か買います、^あ会います、^{あそ}遊びます、^{およ}泳ぎます、など

いつも ^へ部屋^で ^{ひる}昼ごはんを^た食べています。 I always eat lunch in my room.

^{おおさか}大阪^で ^{とも}友だちに ^あ会いました。 I met my friend in Osaka.

ATM ^{かね}で ^{おろ}お金を下しました。 I withdrew money at an ATM.



2. Place of existence; place or point of arrival:

「〇〇に」います、あります、^{すわ}座ります、^お置きます、^つ着きます、^{はい}入ります、^い入れます、など

ここに ^{がいこくじん}外国人が ^{たくさん}います。 There are a lot of foreign people here.

バスは ^{とくしまえき}徳島駅^に ^つ着きました。 The bus arrived at Tokushima Station.



^{つくえ}机 ^{うえ}の上に ^{えんぴつ}えんぴつと ^け消しゴムを ^お置いてください。 Please place your pencil and eraser on your desk.

Let's Practice! Insert either 「で」 or 「に」 into the parenthesis to complete the sentences below.

1) 公園 () サッカーをしませんか。

2) 家 () 車 ^{だい}が 2台あります。

3) もっと ^{まえ}前 () ^{すわ}座りましょう。

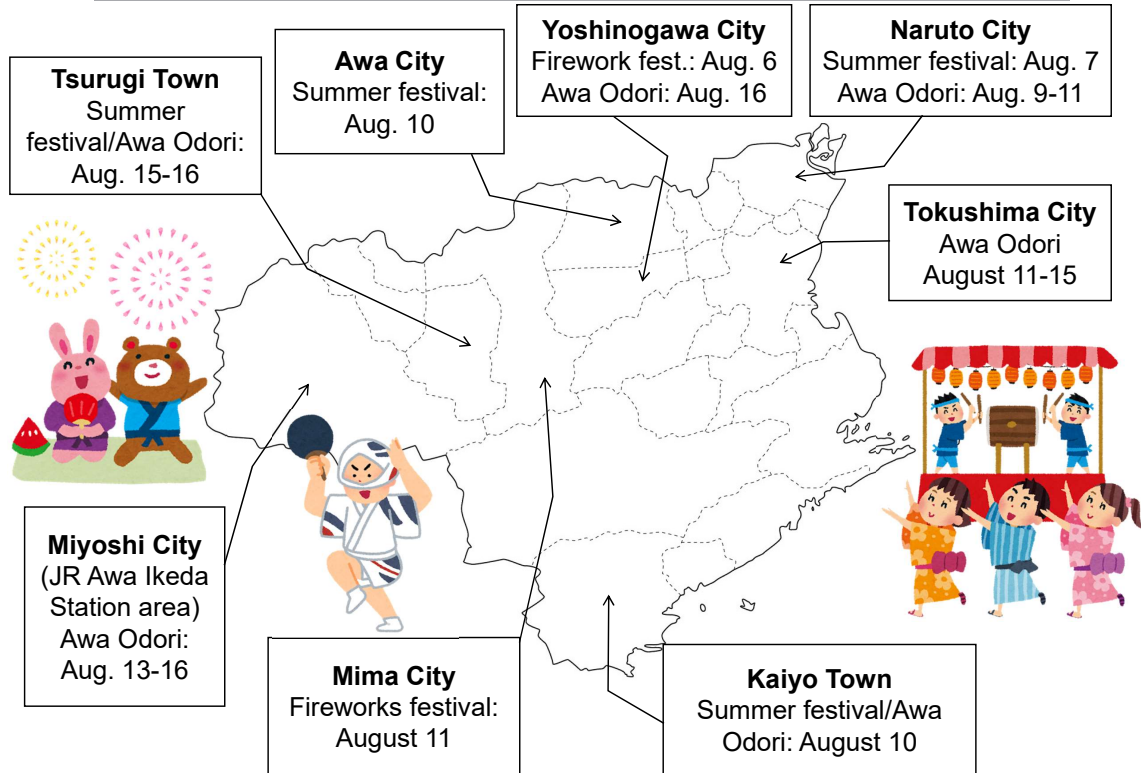
4) のどが ^{かわ}かわきましたね。あそこ () ^{つめ}冷たいジュース^のを飲みませんか。

5) あの角^{かど}を^ま曲がったところ ()、コンビニが ^ありますよ。



Events & Memoranda

Summer Festivals + Awa Odori Map 2025 夏祭り・阿波おどり案内図 2025 年



Let's Dance Awa Odori! 阿波おどりを一緒に踊りましょう！

T.I.A. (Tokushima International Association) will organize an Awa Odori group to dance on August 12. Foreign and Japanese nationals alike are welcome to join us. Please let us know if you want to join us by e-mail or phone by August 8. Let's enjoy a festive summer night in Tokushima!

Date: August 12, 2025 (Tues.)

Time: Arrive at T.I.A. between 16:00-17:00 for a reception and light meal. Practice will be held from 17:10 at the park in front of T.I.A.

Original TIA Happi Coats will be available to rent for 3,000 yen, with 2,000 yen refunded after return. For information on participation fees, please check TIA's homepage listed below.

Inquiries: Tokushima International Assoc. (TIA)
Tel : 088-622-6066 E-mail: info@tia81.com
<http://www.tia81.com/awaodori2025.html>

徳島市国際交流協会では、今夏も阿波おどり連を編成し踊って行きます。外国から来られている皆様にも参加していただき、楽しい阿波おどりにしたいと思っています。参加ご希望の方は、8月8日までに電話やメール等でお知らせ下さい。徳島の夏を私達と一緒に楽しみましょう。

日にち：2025年8月12日（火）

時間（予定）：16:00～17:00 受付・集合・

軽食（徳島市国際交流協会集合）

17:10～踊り練習

TIA オリジナルハッピを貸し出します。但し貸出料として別途3,000円をお預かり、返却の際に貸出料の内クリーニング代の一部として1,000円を差し引き2,000円をお返します。詳しい参加費の情報はホームページにて。

お問い合わせ：徳島市国際交流協会 T. I. A
Tel: 088-622-6066 / E-mail: info@tia81.com
<http://www.tia81.com/awaodori2025.html>

Events & Memoranda

Disaster Prevention Study Tour 2025 防災センタースタディーツアー 2025

If an earthquake or other natural disaster occurs, what will you do? The Tokushima Prefecture Government, in conjunction with the Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association (TOPIA), is proud to announce a study tour for foreign residents at the Tokushima Prefecture Disaster Prevention Center to provide information on what to do in case of a natural disaster. During this study tour, you will be able to experience simulated earthquakes, strong winds, learn how to extinguish a fire, and more. After the tour, NHK Tokushima will give a presentation on how to use portable toilets in an emergency situation. Let's learn about the importance of disaster preparedness together!

*English interpretation will be provided. Chinese and Vietnamese interpretation may also be available.

Date and Time: Sunday, September 28 from 13:00-16:30 (Depart from Tokushima Station at 13:00)

*We will be traveling by bus.

Location: Tokushima Prefectural Disaster Prevention Center (165 Oonishi Taihama, Kitajima-cho, Itano-gun)

Activities: Disaster prevention video screening, earthquake simulations, fire extinguishing simulations, strong wind simulations, etc.

Eligible participants: Foreign residents of Tokushima Prefecture

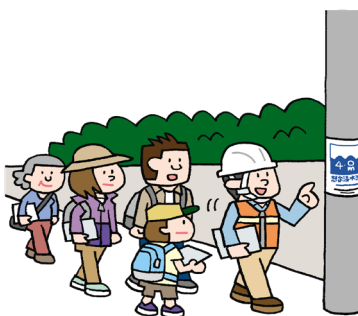
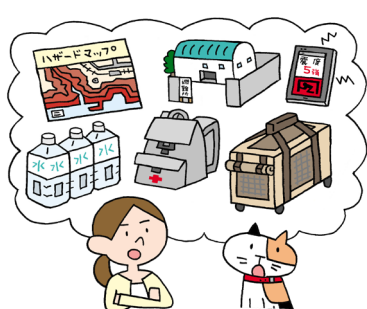
Number of participants: ~15 people.

Participation fee: Free!

Application deadline: September 18 (Thu).

To apply, please send us an email with the following information:

●Name ●Nationality ●Phone number ●Email address ●Occupation. Email to: coordinator1@topia.ne.jp



Consultation Service at TOPIA ・ トピアの相談窓口

TOPIA provides consultation on everyday life, education, labor, medical institutions, and disaster prevention as well as information on sightseeing spots to overseas residents and visitors. When necessary, we will refer you to the appropriate organization that can assist with your needs. Consultation is available in English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese. Please note that although every effort will be made, we may not be able to deal with all cases.

Japanese, English, Chinese: Everyday, 10:00 - 18:00 (closed during the New Year's holidays)

Vietnamese: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, 10:00 - 14:00

Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, 10:00 - 18:00 (closed during the New Year's holidays)

Tel: 088-656-3312 or 088-656-3313 (allows for three-way conversations with an interpreter)